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EAST EUROPEAN MIGRANT WORKERS

ANNCR:

THE MIGRATION OF LABOR FORCE -- PREDOMINANTLY INTO WEST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND THE UNITED STATES IN THE PAST -- HAS BECOME A GROWING PHENOMENON IN THE COMMUNIST COUNTRIES OF EASTERN EUROPE...AS WE HEAR IN THE BACKGROUND REPORT BY VOA'S DOLPH HAERING.

VOICE:

THE LABOR MIGRATION WITHIN EASTERN EUROPE GOES BACK TO EARLY POSTWAR YEARS. BUT IT DID NOT BECOME A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR UNTIL THE LATE NINETEEN SIXTIES, WHEN LABOR SHORTAGES AND REDUCED BIRTH RATES BEGAN TO HAVE A SEVERE IMPACT ON THE LABOR MARKET IN EASTERN EUROPE. BY THE END OF LAST YEAR, THE TOTAL NUMBER OF MIGRANT WORKERS WITHIN EAST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES HAS BEEN ESTIMATED -- FOR LACK OF OFFICIAL FIGURES -- AT ONE HUNDRED SEVENTY-THOUSAND, INCLUDING FIFTY THOUSAND FOREIGN WORKERS HOLDING JOBS IN THE SOVIET UNION.

THE DEMAND FOR FOREIGN LABOR IS HIGHEST IN EAST GERMANY AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA. EAST GERMANY, WITH A PARTICULARLY LOW POPULATION GROWTH RATE AND A HIGH PROPORTION OF ELDERLY CITIZENS, HAS CONTRACTED FOR THOUSANDS OF WORKERS FROM POLAND. EAST GERMANY, IN DESPERATE NEED OF MANPOWER, WAS THE FIRST COMECON COUNTRY TO IMPORT WORKERS FROM OUTSIDE THE TRADING BLOC AREA. CZECHOSLOVAKIA RECENTLY FOLLOWED THIS EXAMPLE WHEN IT SIGNED AN AGREEMENT WITH CYPRUS, PROVIDING FOR FIFTEEN HUNDRED CYPRIOT WORKERS TO BE EMPLOYED IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA WITH AN OPTION FOR MORE WORKERS.

POLAND IS AN EXPORTER OF LABOR DUE TO ITS DIFFICULTIES IN ENSURING FULL EMPLOYMENT FOR ITS OWN WORK FORCE. SEVERAL THOUSAND POLES ARE WORKING IN THE SOVIET UNION TO HELP BUILD OIL AND GAS PIPELINES IN CENTRAL AND WESTERN SIBERIA. AND TENS OF THOUSANDS OF BULGARIAN WORKERS ARE EMPLOYED IN THE SOVIET TIMBER INDUSTRY.

HUNGARY HAS SENT ONLY A FEW WORKERS TO THE SOVIET UNION, BUT SEVERAL THOUSAND HUNGARIANS ARE WORKING IN EAST GERMANY AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA, PARTLY TO GAIN PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE ABROAD. EASTERN EUROPE'S BEST RESERVOIR OF MANPOWER IS UNDOUBTEDLY YUGOSLAVIA.

TO MAKE THE JOBS ATTRACTIVE, FOREIGN WORKERS ARE SOMETIMES OFFERED HIGHER WAGES THAN THEIR NATIVE COLLEAGUES, MUCH TO THE DISCONTENT OF THE DOMESTIC LABOR FORCE. ANOTHER BIG PROBLEM IS THE INABILITY OF FOREIGN WORKERS TO TRANSMIT THEIR EARNINGS TO THEIR FAMILIES AT HOME THE WAY YUGOSLAV WORKERS DO IN WEST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES.

IN ORDER TO CLEAR THE WAY FOR THOUSANDS OF YUGOSLAV WORKERS TO WORK IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA, BELGRADE AND PRAGUE HAVE REACHED A SPECIAL AGREEMENT FOR THE BENEFIT OF FAMILY MEMBERS STAYING AT HOME. YUGOSLAV WORKERS WILL BE ALLOWED TO TRANSMIT THEIR EARNINGS IN SO-CALLED "CLEARING DOLLARS", PAYABLE AT HOME IN DINARS AT THE OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATE INSTEAD OF THE MUCH MORE UNFAVORABLE TOURIST RATE.

OTHER EAST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES WITH MANPOWER NEEDS CAN ALSO DRAW FROM THE YUGOSLAV LABOR RESERVE IF THEY CAN FIND ENOUGH HARD CURRENCIES AND THE RIGHT EXCHANGE ARRANGEMENT, TO MAKE THEIR JOB OFFERS ATTRACTIVE AND COMPETITIVE ENOUGH.

JS/RCS